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Le forme dell'innovazione tra società e tecnoscienza: prospettive ed esperienze di ricerca

Rethinking the role of everyday technical objects: how digital musical technologies and their users are mutually co-constructed

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A technical object represents a complex relation made up of its material form, its functions, the meanings and social representations built around them by the people and the concrete practices of use in everyday life.

Therefore, the study of the social life of an artifact requires a multidisciplinary approach. Recently, the approach of the «co-construction of users and technology» has been introduced (Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003). This approach elaborates concepts and models coming from the «actor-network theory» (Latour, 1987), the «social construction of technology» (Bijker and Pinch, 1984), as well as from sociology of consumption, cultural studies and social theory.

Starting from this theoretical frame, in this contribution I will present some empirical material collected during a research on listening musical technologies. More specifically, the practices of use of mp3 and peer-to-peer technologies will be considered. The empirical data come from 1) about 20 qualitative interviews with mp3 users; 2) analysis of media representations of mp3 and mp3-players; 3) various documents concerning the mp3 and peer-to-peer system.

I outline that the social role of these artifacts is the result of a process of negotiation between practices, cultures and social relations of users and the form and functions of technologies. Indeed, on the one hand, users' musical practices are transformed during this negotiation process: people reshape their musical listening practices, trying to adapt them to the new technology. On the other hand, mp3's and peer-to-peer's characteristics are selected and adapted to people's uses of music: the nature of the technology is defined by the concrete uses which are activated by people in order to comply with their everyday musical needs (De Nora, 2000).

Finally, I will stress how a «theory of social practices» (Schatzki *et al.* 2001; Reckwitz, 2002) represents a useful theoretical background in order to address the complex process of co-construction of users and artifacts.